

Ezekiel

Week 1

Introduction and Background

Outline of Ezekiel

The Book virtually divides itself into three major sections: (1) call and oracles of judgment on Israel (chs 1–24); (2) oracles of judgment on foreign nations, or Gentile oracles (chs 25–32); and (3) oracles and visions of restoration (chs 33–48). (Sometimes chs 40–48 are considered a separate, fourth section.)

- I. Ezekiel's Call and Oracles of Judgment on Israel (chs 1–24)
 - A. Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision and Commissioning (chs 1–3)
 1. Ezekiel's inaugural vision (ch 1)
 2. The prophetic commissioning of Ezekiel: part 1 (ch 2)
 3. The prophetic commissioning of Ezekiel: part 2 (ch 3)
 - B. Prophecies of Judgment against Israel (chs 4–24)
 1. The first action prophecies of Jerusalem's siege and exile (ch 4)
 2. More action prophecies and the first judgment oracle (ch 5)
 3. Judgment for idolatry on the mountains (ch 6)
 4. "The end has come" (ch 7)
 5. The glory of God versus four abominations in the temple (ch 8)
 6. Those without the mark are slain (ch 9)
 7. The glory mounts the throne over the cherubim and wheels (ch 10)
 8. After promising "one heart" and "a new spirit," the glory departs the temple (ch 11)
 9. An action prophecy of the prince's exile and two false proverbs about true prophecy (ch 12)
 10. False prophets and prophetesses (ch 13)
 11. Cases of casuistry (ch 14)
 12. Jerusalem is a useless vine (ch 15)
 13. Jerusalem the whore (ch 16)
 14. The allegory of the cedar sprig and the Messiah planted by Yahweh (ch 17)
 15. The wicked will die, and the righteous will live (ch 18)
 16. A lament for Israel's princes (ch 19)
 17. Review of the old covenant and promise of the new (20:1–44)
 18. Yahweh's punishing sword is drawn (20:45–21:32)
 19. Judgment on the bloody city for her abominations (ch 22)
 20. Two lewd sisters whore against Yahweh (ch 23)
 21. The cooking pot; the death of Ezekiel's wife (ch 24)
- II. Oracles against Other Nations (chs 25–32)
 - A. Oracles against the Ammonites, Moab, Edom, and the Philistines (ch 25)
 - B. An Oracle against Tyre (ch 26)
 - C. A Lament over Tyre (ch 27)
 - D. Tyre's King Is Expelled from Eden (ch 28)
 - E. Judgment for Egypt, Recompense for Babylon, and a Horn for Israel (ch 29)

- F. Egypt Will Fall, and Pharaoh's Arm Will Be Broken (ch 30)
- G. Like Assyria the Cedar, Pharaoh Will Descend to Sheol (chs 31–32)
- III. Oracles and Visions of Israel's Restoration (chs 33–48)
 - A. Oracles of Israel's Eschatological Restoration (ch 33–39)
 - 1. The watchman; the fall of Jerusalem (ch 33)
 - 2. Yahweh will save His sheep through His messianic Shepherd (ch 34)
 - 3. An oracle against Mount Seir (ch 35)
 - 4. Yahweh will sprinkle His people with clean water to give them a new heart and spirit (ch 36)
 - 5. Resurrection of dry bones to become a people united under the new David (ch 37)
 - 6. In the latter days, Gog will attack and be defeated by God (ch 38)
 - 7. Yahweh will defeat Gog and pour out His Spirit on His people (ch 39)
 - B. Vision of the New Temple, the New Creation, and the New Israel (chs 40–48)
 - 1. Vision of the new temple: part 1 (ch 40)
 - 2. Vision of the new temple: part 2 (ch 41)
 - 3. Vision of the new temple: part 3 (ch 42)
 - 4. The return of Yahweh's glory; the altar (ch 43)
 - 5. The prince; the glory; priests and Levites at the temple (ch 44)
 - 6. Property for Yahweh, the priests, and the prince; the major festivals (ch 45)
 - 7. The minor festivals and the prince; inheritance of the prince's property; the sacrificial kitchens (ch 46)
 - 8. Life-giving water in the new creation to be apportioned to Israel (ch 47)
 - 9. The new holy land, whose capital is named "The LORD [Yahweh] Is There" (ch 48)¹

Setting

Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, rebels against the Babylonians, and in 598 BC the Babylonian army arrives to quell the rebellion. Jehoiakim dies (apparently assassinated), and young Jehoiachin becomes king. He quickly surrenders and in 597 BC is taken into captivity along with 10,000 other exiles. Included in this first exile of 597 BC is the young priest Ezekiel. In 593 BC, Yahweh calls the young Ezekiel to be his prophet (Ezek. 1:2). Ezekiel's primary audience is the Hebrew exiles in Babylon, who are struggling to make sense of their exile and the world events that have shattered their lives. Part of Ezekiel's ministry takes place between the two exiles; that is, he preaches some of his messages after the first exile of 597 BC but before the terrible destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 BC. The fall of Jerusalem and the terrible destruction that followed is perhaps the central historical event in the book of Ezekiel. Remember, however, that he is in Babylon when it happens.

Message

Ezekiel's message is similar to the standard three-part message of the preexilic prophets seen throughout Isaiah and Jeremiah. Thus Ezekiel also declares the following: (1) You

¹ Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 1308). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

(Judah) have broken the covenant; you had better repent! (2) No repentance? Then judgment! Judgment will also come on the nations. (3) Yet there is hope beyond the judgment for a glorious, future restoration, both for Israel/Judah and for the nations. Of course, after a few years of Ezekiel's prophetic ministry, Jerusalem is actually destroyed, so Ezekiel's message of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem shifts somewhat from future warning to present explanation.

Within that three-part message, however, Ezekiel focuses on two related themes throughout the book. First, he stresses *the sovereignty and glory of Yahweh*. The Israelites may be in exile, but Yahweh is still in control of history, and he is moving events along according to his sovereignty and his glory. Connected to this theme is the repeated phrase "I am Yahweh" along with associated variations of this phrase such as the clause "that you may know that I am Yahweh" (which occurs 70 times in Ezekiel). Yahweh declares quite clearly that everyone will know that he is Yahweh—the sinful ones through the judgment they receive, and the believing, repentant ones through the blessings and restoration they will experience. Thus the sovereignty of Yahweh is related to the main prophetic points of sin/judgment and restoration/blessing.

The second major theme of Ezekiel is the *presence of Yahweh*. At the heart of the covenant was the promise, "I will be with you/I will live in your midst." Yahweh's powerful presence was with Moses and Israel when they came out of Egypt, appeared in the pillar of fire and the cloud that led them in the wilderness, and then took up residence in the tabernacle. When the temple was built by Solomon, the presence of Yahweh came and filled it. From then on the powerful presence of Yahweh was associated with the temple. It was arguably the most significant blessing that Israel had while dwelling in the Land. When Yahweh departs from the temple (Ezek. 8–10), Israel loses that powerful presence and the wonderful blessings that accompanied it. The latter chapters of Ezekiel, however, describe a time of glorious restoration, centering on a description of the new temple, which is characterized by the presence of Yahweh. This is highlighted by the final statement of the book, "And the name of the city from that time on will be 'Yahweh is there' " (Ezek. 48:35).

Ezekiel can be divided into three main units: Ezekiel 1–24 emphasizes judgment and the destruction of Jerusalem, but with glimpses of deliverance and restoration; Ezekiel 25–32 contains oracles against the nations; and Ezekiel 33–48 looks to the future glorious restoration, focusing especially on the future new temple and the renewed presence of Yahweh.

Most of the preexilic prophets rely heavily on Deuteronomy for their message of covenant violation and judgment. Ezekiel is a priest, and he focuses on "priestly" concerns more than the other prophets do (even though Jeremiah is also from a priestly family). Thus it is not surprising that Ezekiel relies on Leviticus more than Deuteronomy, in contrast to the other prophets.²

² Hays, J. D. (2010). *Message of the prophets: a survey of the prophetic and apocalyptic books of the Old Testament* (pp. 200–201). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.